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Montgomery County's Veterans Treatment Court Offers Opportunity For A Second Chance

by Allison Loy

Today our series called Veterans Voices continues as we learn about the Montgomery County Veterans Treatment Court. For Veterans, reintegration back into civilian life after military service can be traumatic. Many vets make this transition successfully, but for others it's very difficult, and some even commit crimes as a result of service-related trauma. Rather than let these men and women get lost in the criminal justice system, the Veterans Treatment Court was created – and courts like these are happening more around the country. Veterans Voices reporter Allison Loy, an Air Force veteran herself, has the story.

Veterans Treatment Courts are special courts created to assist those veterans who are involved in criminal behavior and who also struggle with disorders due to their combat experience. In Veterans Treatment Court, participation is voluntary and in order to qualify, a participant must take responsibility for his or her offense and plead guilty. The Honorable Dennis J. Adkins started Montgomery County's Veterans Treatment Court, and its first session was on November 20, 2013.

These veterans are coming back and they're expected to go back to their lives that they had before and they're having a very difficult time doing that to the extent that it's causing an increased level of PTSD, and an increased level of aggressiveness, and an increased level of substance abuse."

Research and the success of 130 other veteran courts in the US supported the idea that these situations were best handled by connecting the veterans with the available treatments and services already offered as opposed to incarceration.

We have 900,000 veterans in the state of Ohio alone. When we looked at how many veterans we had on probation here, it was enough to justify what we did," says Adkins.

There are three phases to the Veteran's Treatment Court and it takes about 9 months to complete the program: During the first phase the needs of the veteran are assessed; the second phase is where they are receiving the designated treatment; the third phase then focuses on reintegration back into the community.

We had a young man who had done two tours over in Iraq, but he sort of struggled, and did struggle on regular probation," says Adkins. "He was on it for about a year and a half – two

years, and he was about one step away from going to prison. We took ahold of him when our program started and finally got him into an intensive residential treatment program and he appeared in front of me at one of the dockets coming out of the program and I asked him how he's doing and he said 'Judge, I want to thank you because you saved my life.' That alone when somebody said that made me realize that this was something very special that we were doing and we were making differences in people's lives."

Veterans Treatment Courts are a combined effort that depend upon involvement from other community agencies

"Colonel Cassie Barlow, who was the Wing Commander out at Wright Patt had called me up in March this year and wanted to come out and just talk about the program," says Adkins.

"So we talked a little bit about, you know, what we could do from an installation perspective before people get out to kind of talk to them about the potential pitfalls that are out there," says Barlow. "Another thing that we kind of offered to help on from an installation perspective was potential mentors just having the base there as an extension."

"A mentor is very important because these young men and women need a friend that they can go and talk to," says Adkins.

The first graduation of Montgomery County's Veterans Treatment Court was on October 29th 2014. The courtroom was crowded with people there to support both the first graduates and those currently in the program.

"This program is not easy," said Adkins during the ceremony. "But those that make it through should be proud, and their families here should be proud, and you in the audience should be proud of their accomplishments. We began this program and we all had a vision of how this program was going to work. We were treading new territory and trying a new concept never tried before in this court. "

Colonel Barlow was there and said of attending, "It was really cool to actually be there and see the impact of that program, and see the specific impact on people's lives that that court is making."

There were two graduates that day. Jerry Haller was one of them.

"As in life, sometimes you're dealt a blow so to speak, fell flat on my face, I have to admit, and this program provided me a path out of where I was," he said.

"We need to address these issues and help our veterans," says Adkins. "Either to avoid the criminal justice system or if they get involved to treat their problems to make sure that they recover and they don't continue on in their criminal activity."

For more information on services available to veterans, [visit the resource page at the Wright State University Veteran and Military Center website](#).

Veterans Voices is part of [Veterans Coming Home](#), a public media effort to support veterans, made possible by the [Corporation for Public Broadcasting](#).

Photo:

caption: Montgomery County's Veterans Treatment Court

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